

Eggon language

Eggon (also **Egon**, **Ero**, or **Mo Egon**), erroneously referred to as **Mada** - formerly a Plateau language spoken in central Nigeria. It is a major language in Nasarawa State.

Contents

- Classification**
- Distribution**
 - Dialects
- Written language**
- Bibliography**
- References**
- External links**

Classification

The exact classification of the Eggon language has been in dispute and it can be said that this issue remains unresolved. Eggon was first classified by Greenberg (1963) as a Plateau language in his group 5, together with Nungu and Yeskwa. In the revision prepared by Carl Hoffman published in Hansford et al. (1976) a Benue group was set up that combined Greenberg's Plateau 5 and 7 with Jukunoid. The new subgrouping classified Eggon together with Nungu, Ake and Jidda-Abu. This concept of a Benue grouping came from the lexicostatistical studies of Shimizu (1975) who argued against the unity of Greenberg's Plateau and proposed the Benue group. However, in 1983, Gerhardt published a convincing rebuttal of Shimizu's arguments. The latest version of classification of Plateau languages in Gerhardt (1989) adds Yashi to the Eggon subgroup but removes the links with 'Benue' i.e. Tarok and the Jukunoid languages. Blench (2008) classifies Eggon and Ake as the Eggonic group of the Southern branch of Plateau.

Distribution

The main towns of the Eggon people are Eggon, Kagbu, Washo and Wana. They stretch as far south as Lafia and west of Akwanga as far as the railway line. They are bordered on the north by the Mada and to the south by the Migili and the Idoma.

In much of the colonial literature, the Eggon were known as the "Hill Mada" in contrast to the "Plains Mada", the people known as Mada today. The Eggon lived in the Mada hills south of Akwanga in the pre-colonial period, but there is no connection between the groups that would justify these terms, and they have

Eggon	
<i>Onumu Egon</i>	
Native to	Nigeria
Region	Nasarawa, Kaduna, Benue states
Native speakers	(140,000 cited 1990) ^[1]
Language family	<p>Niger–Congo</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Atlantic–Congo ▪ Benue–Congo ▪ Plateau ▪ South ▪ Eggonic ▪ Eggon
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	ego
Glottolog	eggo1239 (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/eggo1239) ^[2]

Egon ^[3]	
People	Mo Egon
Language	Onumu Egon

now been discarded.

The exact number of speakers is unknown, but it is unlikely to be less than the estimate of 200,000 given by Sibomana (1985). Ames (1934) gave a figure of 41,276 for the 1920s, but this is likely to have been substantially underestimated. Welmers (1971) estimated 52,000 although this may have been only a projection from Ames.

Very little has been written about Eggon society and Temple (1922) and Ames (1934) are the only sources that contain any descriptions of Eggon social organisation.

Dialects

Eggon is conventionally divided into twenty-five mutually comprehensible dialects, some of which are; Eggon Wangibi, Ikka, Wana, Washo, Wakama, Ogne, Angbashu, Alushi, Alogani, Eva, Nabe, Lizzi, Ezzen, Arikpa, etc. The only author to discuss dialects is Sibomana (1985) whose discussion focuses on Kagbu, which he states is the main dialect. He also cites data from the Eggon dialect. The Benue–Congo Comparative Wordlist (1969, 1972) also gives data from two dialects.

A twenty-sixth variety is Madan-tara, spoken by a group of Eggon east of Eggon. It is said to be impossible to understand without special learning and is sufficiently different from other lects to be effectively a new language. Its precise relationship to the other varieties of Eggon is unknown.

Written language

Eggon has no literary standard language. The earliest written material in Eggon appears to be scripture portions from 1937, probably prepared by I.D. Hepburn. The dialect chosen for bible translation is based on the Wana dialect, although it is supplemented by forms from other dialects and so is a sort of synthetic Eggon not based on the speech of a particular group. A hymnbook and 2 readers were prepared, and the translation of the New Testament was completed in 1974. The orthography of the New Testament is somewhat different from the earlier publications. There are however, literature works written in eggon language which provides confidence for one to surely say there is improvement in the written language of eggon. There are also summer lessons to teach and train eggon sons and daughters their language and culture.

Eggon is apparently in use in churches only in remoter regions and it has been displaced by Hausa in all establishments along the main road. However, there is apparently a move to revive the use of Eggon. Some evidence of this is the recent publication of new material in Eggon, a book of history and customs and a women's magazine which is intended to make a regular appearance.

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2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Eggon" (<http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/egg01239>). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
3. Blench, Roger (2019). *An Atlas of Nigerian Languages* (4th ed.). Cambridge: Kay Williamson Educational Foundation.

- *A dictionary of Eggon*, edited by Roger Blench (in preparation)

External links

- Excerpts from "A dictionary of Eggon", edited by Roger Blench (<https://web.archive.org/web/20051216001207/http://www.uiowa.edu/intlinet/unijos/nigonet/nlp/eggon.htm>)

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